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Indiana State Department of Health

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Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Fact Sheet

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Infection

- HPV is a virus that causes many infections. HPV infection is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STD). This infection is spread by skin-to-skin contact during sex with a person infected with HPV. It causes genital warts or infection of the cervix (the upper part of the vagina, which connects to the uterus or womb).
- The best way to prevent getting HPV is to not have sex, because a person usually can't tell if he or she is infected. Infected people can give the virus to others during sexual contact without knowing it. Most females get HPV soon after becoming sexually active.
- Even though the HPV infection can go away on its own, it may last for months or years. There is no medication to treat HPV infection so it is very important to prevent infection or find its presence early.
- HPV infection can cause cervical changes that can lead to cancer of the cervix. It can also cause cancer of other genital organs. A Pap test, which examines the cells of the cervix, can find the presence of these cervical changes due to HPV infection. If the Pap test shows abnormal cells, a health care provider will do more tests and/or provide treatment as needed.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

- In June, 2006 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) licensed a vaccine that can prevent HPV infection. It is to be used in girls and young women 9 to 26 years old. It is the first vaccine that can prevent cervical cancer.

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- There are over 100 different types of HPV virus. The vaccine only protects against four types of HPV. Two types (types 16 and 18) are known to cause 70% of cervical cancer. The other two types (types 6 and 11) can cause 90% of genital warts. The vaccine has been found to be 90-100% effective in preventing these four types of HPV infection. The vaccine does not treat girls or young women who are already infected with these four types of HPV or have genital warts.
- The new vaccine is a series of three shots over six months. The vaccine is not made from live virus nor does it contain thimerosal or mercury. The vaccine is not licensed to give to boys and young men, although it is being tested in males.
- Because the vaccine prevents infection by these four types of HPV, it works best in girls and young women who have not been in contact with the HPV infection. The vaccine is licensed for girls/young women ages 9 to 26 years. The vaccine has been found to give better protection at the younger ages as compared to older ages. The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends the HPV vaccine for all 11 and 12 year old girls and for those 9-26 who have not yet been vaccinated. Any concerns or questions should be discussed with a health care provider.
- No one knows how long the vaccine will protect a recipient. Research has shown that there is at least a 5 year protection rate. The vaccine is not recommended for someone who is pregnant. The vaccine is not recommended for those who have something wrong with their immune system or certain other medical conditions. Major side effects are rare. The most common side effects are swelling or redness at the site of the shot and possibly fainting or nausea. These side effects are the same as with other vaccines.
- The vaccine does not replace the need for cervical cancer screening through Pap tests. All girls and young women who have received the HPV vaccine and are sexually active, need regular Pap tests to find precancerous changes in the cervix and to have any precancerous changes treated before cervical cancer develops.

This information is provided by the Indiana State Department of Health as required by Public Law 80 (Senate Enrolled Act 327) of 2007.

Questions may be directed to the Indiana State Department of Health Immunization Program at 1-800-701-0704.